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ABSTRACT

This document, a first "theme" issue of a projected quarterly publication on developments in gifted education, focuses on theoretical principles and practical suggestions concerning student identification for gifted programs in Texas. The first article, "Developing Defensible Identification Procedures," is by Tommie Sue Anthony. It notes that school districts must: (1) recognize that schools often present barriers to identifying gifted minority students; (2) understand that as much diversity of talent exists within the gifted population as within the general population; and (3) include recognized "best practices" in the identification process. The second article, by Mary Keller, is entitled "A Holistic Approach to the Identification of Gifted Youth." It suggests that a comprehensive, child-centered procedure has advantages both for participating professionals and students being assessed. The third article, "Using Product Portfolios for Student Assessment for Gifted Programs," by Julie Duncan and Edie Dougherty, provides information on using nontraditional assessment measures. A question and answer section on various issues related to student identification including Texas rules concludes the issue. (DB)

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UPDATE ON GIFTED EDUCATION

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UPDATE
ON
GIFTED EDUCATION

April 1991

A Publication of the
Division of Gifted/Talented Education
Texas Education Agency

FOREWORD

In 1990, the mandate for identifying and serving gifted youth was inaugurated in Texas. Any transition is difficult, and this one was no different. As local districts moved from voluntary programs that may have served only a few grades to comprehensive services in kindergarten through grade twelve, the need for more information was evident.

The Texas Education Agency seeks to assist districts in developing exemplary programs for all their students. To do this, it must assure that the most current information, both on the latest research and on successful practices, is made available to schools as quickly and efficiently as possible. This issue of *Update on Gifted Education* is the first of what, hopefully, will be a quarterly publication on developments in this exciting area of education. While this issue focuses on issues relating to identification, future volumes will deal with areas such as teacher and staff training, curriculum development, program models, and program evaluation.

In most cases, authors of the articles will be Texas educators who have experience in working with gifted students. Other articles by educators and consultants of national reputation will supplement the efforts of our own local experts. Additionally, in the first several issues, there will be a question and answer section that focuses on specific topics. In this quarter's publication, the question and answer section deals with identification and should provide some guidance in complying with both legislative requirements and State Board of Education rules.

It is hoped that this publication will serve as a guide in the development of district level programs for gifted students. If there are suggestions for improving it or recommendations regarding the inclusion of certain topics in future issues, please contact the Division of Gifted/Talented Education at 512/463-9455. We look forward to working with you to build a strong program for gifted students in Texas.

Sincerely,

J. R. Cummings
Deputy Commissioner for
Special Programs

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INTRODUCTION

This issue of *Update on Gifted Education* focuses on the topic of student identification for gifted programs. It offers both a theoretical underpinning for the identification process and practical suggestions based on the experiences of Texas educators.

The first article, "Developing Defensible Identification Procedures," is by Tommie Sue Anthony, who coordinates the program for gifted students in Pulaski County, Arkansas. Ms. Anthony has appeared in federal court to explain district identification policies and has first hand experience at building an identification procedure that is both educationally and legally defensible.

Mary Keller's article, "A Holistic Approach to the Identification of Gifted Youth," offers one district's approach to defensible identification of students. Dr. Keller, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction in Denver City Independent School District, Denver City, Texas, suggests that a comprehensive, child centered procedure has several advantages, both for the professionals who participate in the process and for the students who are being assessed.

The third article, "Using Product Portfolios for Student Assessment for Gifted Programs," by Julie Duncan and Edie Dougherty of Lubbock Independent School District, provides information on using non-traditional assessment measures as part of the identification process. Lubbock I. S. D. has been identifying and serving kindergarten and primary aged gifted students for several years and has modified a procedure originally developed by the Texas Education Agency as part of the Chapter 2 project, Institutes for Teachers of the Disadvantaged Gifted. Lubbock successfully incorporates a Product Portfolio into its identification procedure and finds it to be a useful tool in teacher assessment of student potential.

A question and answer section on issues relating to State Board rules on student identification concludes this issue. These were developed in response to frequently asked questions from school district personnel and parents of gifted youth. Should there be questions on identification that are not covered, please submit them in writing for response in future issues.

Evelyn Levsky Hiatt and Jeanette Covington, Co-editors

Developing Defensible Identification Procedures

Tommie Sue Anthony
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Developing programs for the gifted can be exciting, challenging, and satisfying. While developing curriculum, units of study, and enrichment activities that challenge and stimulate bright young minds takes time and effort, it basically is not difficult. In contrast, developing defensible identification procedures and practices is neither easy nor fun, and sometimes it can be unpopular. Yet, if programs for the gifted are to survive in the twenty-first century, identification procedures must be defensible.

"Defensible identification procedures" does not mean establishing a cut-off score on a standardized achievement test or on an individual intelligence test, nor does it mean explaining why a child is not placed in a program by saying, "We used the such-and-such test and your child did not make the designated score." It does not mean justifying the underrepresentation of minority students in the program by saying, "Those students don't score well on tests." Instead, the phrase means procedures and policies that allow minority students, underachievers, and handicapped students to be identified and served. It means developing practices and procedures that can disprove charges of "elitism" or "discrimination." It means developing identification procedures that match the program model. Most of all, it means recognizing that rigid identification procedures can unintentionally exclude many gifted students from special populations and making the commitment that the goal of identification is to include children rather than to exclude them.

How then, may a school system develop defensible identification procedures? First, the district must recognize that school systems sometimes present enormous barriers to identifying gifted minority students. Some of these barriers, outlined by Passow (1986), are:

- Attitudes and expectations of educators who often do not believe there is giftedness in culturally different populations.
- Over-reliance on intelligence tests that focus mainly on the absorption of facts and the systematic processing of those facts in predetermined ways as the prime criterion for identification.
- Rigid learning environment, in which the diverse skills and interests and kinesthetic modes of expression that many culturally different children have are frequently ignored or discouraged.
- Failure to provide the necessary general education, basic skills foundation, and learning-to-learn skills that are required for the further development of specialized talents.
- Failure to create a learning environment and a climate for achievement in which attention is given to both the affective and cognitive elements of talent development.
- Failure to select, assign, and provide appropriate inservice education to teachers, counselors, administrators and other educators who must create conditions for learning and who, by serving as the gatekeepers for programs and services, play critical roles in developing talent.
- Failure to help culturally different students enhance their self-esteem and recognize that a low self-concept and a built-in expectation of failure are often evident in minority children because of the systematic and long-term discrimination they and their families have experienced.
- Failure to provide appropriate guidance and other support services.

By recognizing these barriers, openly discussing them, and working to eliminate them,

school systems can take a big step toward developing defensible identification procedures.

Second, school systems must recognize that as much diversity of talent exists within the gifted population as does within the general population. Not all gifted students make good grades or get high scores on standardized tests. This means no one program option can meet the needs of all gifted students and that school systems should provide a variety of program options. Many gifted students, particularly minority students, may be excluded from a single option program if that option does not match their talent or strength. For instance, if English or advanced mathematics is the only option available at the secondary level, then gifted students who are not mathematically talented or students who do not speak standard English may be excluded. School systems that are truly committed to establishing defensible identification procedures also will commit to providing a variety of options so that a variety of gifted students rather than a small group who possess a common talent or trait, can be served.

Third, school systems should include the following practices in their identification procedures.

1. School systems should seek nominations for the program from a variety of sources - parents, teachers, community leaders, peers, self, librarians. Systems should encourage nominations, and the community should be aware of the nomination procedures. Schools could send letters to parents asking them to nominate their children. Also, personnel could speak to community groups, including church groups, about the program.

2. Gifted program personnel should monitor the nominations to insure that disadvantaged minority students are nominated. If they are not nominated, then personnel should solicit nominations. It is logical that if students are not nominated, then they certainly will not be placed in a program for the gifted. Also, school personnel and the community may need to be informed about the behavioral characteristics of both majority and minority gifted students.

3. School systems should use multiple sources of data rather than relying solely on test scores. Student interviews, parent questionnaires, samples of student work, and anecdotal records are all sources of valid information that should be used. A defensible rule is, "No one score puts a child in, and no one score keeps a child out." Systems must also determine if there is a disparity between the test scores of students from different populations or socio-economic groups. It is imperative that screening committees know about the disparity, know how great it is, and know why it exists. This knowledge will put test scores in a different light and will help staff to spot students with potential.

4. The selection process should be done by a trained committee rather than an individual. The committee should reflect the racial composition of the school, and the committee should be very knowledgeable about indicators of giftedness. The use of a culturally diverse committee of knowledgeable educators will do more to reduce charges of elitism than almost anything else.

5. School systems should make sure that the community is aware of the identification procedures. Identification should not be a secret, mysterious happening. Many minority groups view gifted programs negatively, and systems must make an effort to change these perceptions. Publicly discussing procedures and answering questions about the program may help to change these negative perceptions among minority groups.

Finally, the best way to develop defensible identification procedures is to follow Fraiser's (1987) "best practices" in identification.

1. The focus is on the diversity within gifted populations. The gifted are not a homogeneous group nor do they express their talents in the same way.

2. The goal of identification is inclusion rather than exclusion of students.

3. Data are gathered from multiple sources; a single criterion of giftedness should be avoided.

4. Both objective and subjective data are collected.

5. Professionals and nonprofessionals who represent various areas of expertise and who are knowledgeable about behavioral indicators of giftedness are involved in the identification process.

6. Identification of giftedness occurs as early as possible, consists of a series of steps, and is continuous.

7. Special attention is given to the different ways in which children from different cultures manifest behavioral indicators of giftedness.

8. Decision-making is delayed until all pertinent data on a student has been reviewed.

9. Data collected during the identification process are used to help determine the curriculum.

By following Frasier's "best practices," insuring that disadvantaged minority students are nominated, using multiple sources of information, providing extensive inservice to all staff members, and developing community awareness and support, school systems can develop defensible identification procedures without eroding the quality of the program. In the coming years programs for the gifted must include greater numbers of children from economically and culturally different groups. Defensible identification procedures will allow this to happen. Without these defensible identification practices, programs for the gifted may not survive in the 1990s and beyond.

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"The problem of gaining support for educating 'gifted' students in the United States is essentially not an instructional problem; it is a values problem. Unless we understand that fact, we can find ourselves believing that we are arguing about technical issues of identification, acceleration, and grouping when what we are really in dispute about are our societal and personal values."

James J. Gallagher
Educational Reform, Values, and Gifted Students

A Holistic Approach to the Identification of Gifted Youth

Mary M. Keller
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A holistic approach to identification of gifted and talented youth is a process worthy of consideration for three reasons:

- it is congruent with the new directions and refinements emerging in education that emphasize quality, performance, and participation;
- it is purposefully and openly concerned with the ethical reasoning, reflection, and actions directly related to appropriate program access; and
- it is an alternative to the matrix that makes maximum use of empowered committees.

Senate Bill 1 requires that schools involve teachers as decision-makers and that parents and community members work with the school as authentic partners. The holistic method of identifying potentially gifted students is one forum for including people in a child-sensitive process.

The ethical issues, requisite to the holistic approach, focus around an inclusive philosophy and process. The procedure, therefore, becomes a vehicle for translating philosophy into intentionally reflective collegial actions. Strike, Haller, and Soltis (1988) referred to a deliberate reflection-action process as the "application of principle to cases. Applying moral principle to cases requires expressing and clarifying the principles and finding out the relevant facts about the cases" (p.4). In the holistic approach, empowered committees examine both the qualitative and quantitative evidence for individual students, on a case by case basis. Thus, this committee-driven process provides a thoughtful template for the expression, clarification, and discernment of salient information.

A holistic approach for identification of gifted youth merges measurement-driven, process or quantitative procedures, with nuance-driven or qualitative methodologies. The most striking benefit of a holistic process; therefore, becomes the integration of both deductive and inductive processes into a new context for identifying and serving gifted students. This integrated quantitative/qualitative system actually begins a consistent commitment to process, product, and content with the identification phase.

Becoming more than a mere euphemism, the tripartite link to process, product and content underscores the critical issue. Test scores are, in and of themselves, inadequate. The holistic context, therefore, is in accord with recommendations put forth by the National Commission on Testing and Public Policy (1990) which states:

> test scores are imperfect measures and should not be used alone
>
> to make important decisions about individuals, groups, or institutions;
>
> in the allocation of opportunities, individuals' past performance
>
> and relevant experience must be considered. (p.9)

Denver City ISD's holistic model, as described in this article, is only one adaptation of the process. The holistic process, in current use in Denver City, functions through the use of four committees that operate in a two-tiered committee structure. The first tier in the committee structure is the elementary and secondary screening committees. The single committee membership limitation, along with the dual structure of separate

screening and selection committees, innately provides a secure, double-blind check and balance system to the nomination, screening, and selection process.

Nomination

Nominations for Denver City's gifted program are gathered from ***all*** professional staff members during the months of October, January, and April. During the periods open for nomination ***any*** professional staff member may nominate ***any*** student (kindergarten through grade 12). Nominations are accepted from parents at any time during the year. It is the intent of this "casting out of the net" to gather as many potential candidates as possible, the screening and selection phases narrow the candidate pool.

In the process of "casting out the net," the October nomination period is considered the most intensive collection of potential candidates. The later two nomination periods are intended to open the window of opportunity for new students, or for students who have re-emerged in the process as a result of an accumulation of nominations.

The nomination phase can be summarized as follows:

- The "Professional Screening Instrument," listing and describing gifted characteristics is given to certified staff. This document does not ask the staff member to name him/herself, rather, it asks the nominator to indicate his/her relationship to the child. The relationship request is a significant issue in the nomination phase. An inclusive process is one that is sensitive to the manifestation of giftedness in both school and non-school environments. The relationship categories included on the "Professional Screening Instrument" are: current teacher, former teacher, other professional (such as principal, counselor, nurse), friend of child (such as Sunday school teacher, scout leader, neighbor), relative (other than parent), or other relationship.

- In order to assist parents in the nomination of their children, the district provides parent training sessions discussing characteristics of potentially gifted youth and the procedure for completing the "Parental Nomination Form."

- In grades six through twelve, students are allowed to nominate either themselves or their peers.

- In the elementary grades, a series of demonstration lessons, taught by the elementary gifted and talented (gifted) consulting teacher, are designed to free classroom teachers to observe their students in a controlled situation which emphasizes either creative productive thinking or logical problem solving. These demonstration lessons serve a two-fold purpose: first, to allow classroom teachers the freedom to observe and record the interactions and responses of individual students; and second, to provide a relevant forum for the modeling of creative/higher level strategies for all students.

The information gathered by the classroom teacher from the demonstration lessons is not only useful evidence for nomination; it can be added later to the candidate profiles during the selection phase.

Screening

Both the elementary and the secondary screening committees are made up of four to five teachers and at least one parent. It is critical that all committee members receive intensive training in the characteristics of potentially gifted students, in the overall philosophy and process for holistic identification, and in the specific responsibilities and purpose of the screening committee.

It is as fundamental at the screening phase as it is at the selection phase that committees are authentically and knowledgeably empowered through both precision training and genuine authority to make decisions. Parents serving on either the screening or selection committees have proven to be valued sources of diverse and insightful points of view.

District gifted consulting teachers facilitate the screening committees; however, neither they nor any administrator hold committee membership or decision-making rights.

Screening Phase

PROFESSIONAL SCREENING INSTRUMENT

Relationship to Child		
Current Teacher (Grade)		
Former Teacher (Estimated Grade Now)		
Other Professional (Specify:)	(Estimated Grade Now:)	
Friend (to the child, not the parents)	(Estimated Grade Now:)	
Relative (Specify:)	(Estimated Grade Now:)	
Other:	(Estimated Grade Now:)	

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	Student's Name		
							Articulate	1.	Has unusual advanced vocabulary for age; can communicate well.
							Knowledgeable	2.	Asks many questions in class; may read independently on interests rather than complete assigned work.
							Good Memory	3.	Acquires basic skills rapidly; if not stimulated may become discipline problem; absorbs difficult material quickly.
							Inquisitive	4.	Enjoys discussions which examine the why's and how's, may challenge teacher statements; can solve unique problems.
							Conceptual Understanding	5.	Reasons things out; may not see the need to master skills and prefers to spend time thinking; enjoys challenging problems.
							Perceptiveness	6.	Understands purposes; keen and alert observer; frustrated with unaware peers.
							Reading Maturity	7.	Reads well and can comprehend at a higher level than peers; may show preference for biography, encyclopedias, etc.
							Analytical Reasoning	8.	Comprehends advanced abstract ideas and concepts easily; impatient with drill activities; enjoys intellectual challenge.
							Task Commitment	9.	Spends much longer periods of time on topics than peers; sometimes difficult to get him to move on to another topic.
							Self-Motivated	10.	Seems to be a self starter; questions in order to learn more; may resist work that is not considered exciting.
							Perfectionist	11.	Attention to detail and refining products; frustrated with his work; may tend to give up if success is too late in coming.
							Self-Direction	12.	Prefers to work independently; may resist group activities; takes time alone to think through problems.
							Maturity of Interests	13.	Aware of current events and their effect; may have own uniqueness which leads to feelings of loneliness.
							Methodical	14.	Likes to organize and bring structure to things; people and situations; may be domineering or "bossy."
							Curiosity	15.	Displays a great deal of curiosity about many things; constantly asking questions.
							Fluency	16.	Generates a large number of ideas or solutions to problems and questions; offers unusually clever responses.
							High Risk Taker	17.	Is adventurous and speculative; sometimes gets into a "bind" because of this.
							Imaginative	18.	Displays a good deal of intellectual playfulness; fantasizes; concerned with adapting, improving, and modifying objects, etc.; "I wonder..."
							Sense of Humor	19.	Displays a keen sense of humor in situations that may not appear humorous to others; laughs at jokes peers do not understand.
							Sensitivity	20.	Unusually aware of his own impulses; sensitive to emotions and beauty; attends to aesthetic characteristics.
							Individualistic	21.	Nonconforming; accepts disorder; not interested in detail; has no fear of being different.
							Critical	22.	Criticizes constructively; unwilling to accept authoritarian situations without critical examination; sometimes seen as obnoxious.

The responsibilities and procedures for the screening committee(s) can be outlined as follows:

- to document on the "Student Screening Card" all nominations from professionals, parents, self, or peers for each individual student nominated. The documentation process includes the tallying and recording of individual responses from the "Professional Screening Instrument," parent nominations, and self or peer nominations at the secondary level.

- to use additional sources to add quantitative and demographic data to the "Student Screening Card" or create a new card for a student using the collective evidence from additional data sources. The additional data sources made available to the committee(s) include:

  ••standardized norm-referenced test scores,
  ••bilingual or ESL eligibility,
  ••free/reduced lunch eligibility, and
  ••TEAMS/TAAS written composition scores.

- to check that all "Student Screening Cards" are complete and to rank order these cards from high to low based upon nomination density and additional data sources.

- to consider the preponderance of the evidence and choose candidates for the selection phase. Decisions for candidate status are made collaboratively by the committee strictly under a majority vote rule. (See Figure 1.)

With practice, screening committees become increasingly more confident in their ability to rank the "Student Screening Cards" and to detect natural breaks between those students who will remain at the screening phase and those students who will progress to the selection phase as program candidates.

Selection

After the screening committee has determined which student candidates should progress to selection, the gifted consulting teacher obtains permission from the parents to begin appropriate testing and data gathering. The consultant then initiates a candidate profile containing subjective and objective data composed of products, work samples, results of teacher observations, student contributions, an indepth parent inventory, a structured student interview, creativity assessments, and assessments of general intellectual ability.

The gifted consultants prepare for the selection committee statistical information compiled from locally normed composite quantitative data. The selection committee sees these grade level statistics in both aggregated and disaggregated by sex and ethnicity form.

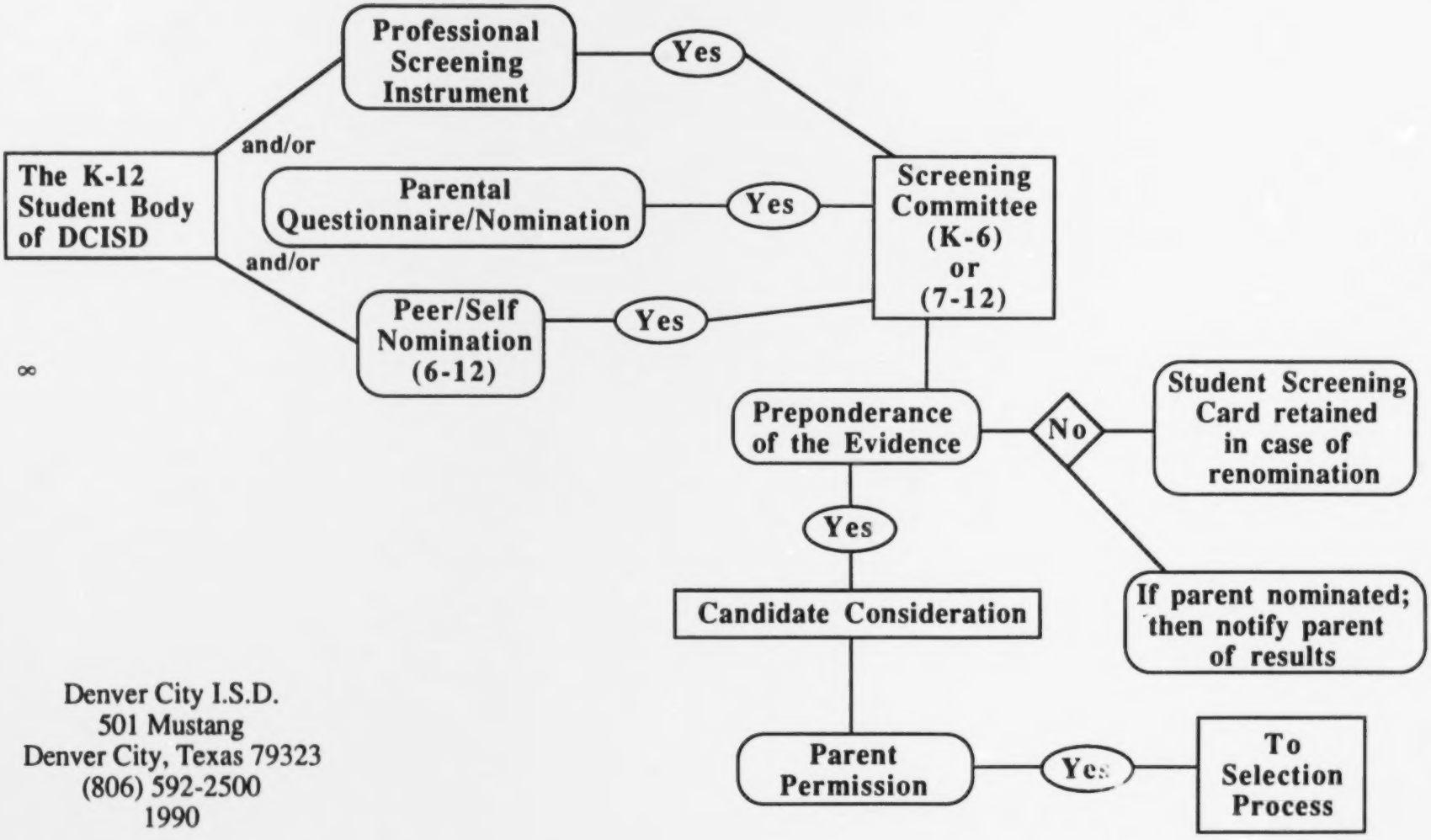
The K-6 and 7-12 selection committees are composed of from four to eight teachers and at least one parent. Gifted consultants and district administrators may not be selection committee members. Like the screening committee, selection committee members receive extensive training in characteristics, identification process, and committee responsibilities. The selection committee, elementary or secondary, convenes after the gifted consulting teacher(s) has completed all individual candidates profiles and has prepared all the statistical information. Using a case by case process the gifted consulting teacher presents each candidate's profile to the committee. Student candidates are identified only by code numbers. The selection committee is given non-identifying demographic information on candidates as a part of the presentation process. As in the screening committee, a selection committee member must withdraw when a student being considered is related to him/her or recognized despite the coding.

It is essential that the consultant presents the selection committee with all subjective or qualitative information contained in the candidate's profile ***before*** sharing the objective or quantitative data. The reflective examination of subjective data must be the initial impression the committee receives because of the tendency of committee members to emphasize test results to the exclusion of the equally powerful qualitative data.

After reflection, discussion, and discerning relevant facts, the committee examines each candidate's potential from a "big picture"

FIGURE 1

SCREENING PROCESS



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1990

perspective. The selection committee ultimately arrives at a program placement majority decision based upon the preponderance of the evidence. Both screening and selection committees are instructed that if a decision is in doubt to vote for the inclusion of the child in the program.

The selection committee's collaborative decision is neither made under the confines of participation quota nor under the predetermined restraints of cut-off scores.

In deciding placement the selection committee may choose from one of the following options:

- **Full Status** - All profile data, both objective and subjective, indicate potential giftedness.

- **Monitored Status** - Potential giftedness is indicated; however, inconsistencies appear in subjective and/or objective profile data. If a candidate is assigned monitored status the selection committee has two additional options:

  Need more data - The Committee directs the gifted consultants to expand upon the profile data. The Committee's decision is delayed until the profile is expanded.

  Place and Observe - The student candidate is placed in the program and receives full services while performance is observed within a gifted environment. The Committee reviews the student's status after a stated period of time.

- **Talent Pool** - In the holistic process a student who reaches candidate status has some measure of potential; therefore, in recognizing that potential the selection committee may determine that the district's enrichment program for able learners at the elementary level and enrichment/elective or honors classes at the secondary level is the most appropriate placement. Talent pool students are not precluded from later entry into the gifted program.

The candidate's parents are informed by the gifted consulting teacher of the selection committee's decision. If a candidate is recommended for program participation, the consultant seeks parent permission. Parents of all post-selection student candidates are invited by the consultant for an individual conference to review the profile, discuss program status recommendations, and to gain information about the district's gifted and enrichment programs. Parent conferences are also seen as an opportunity to give parents at-home ideas and to encourage them to become involved in gifted/enrichment education as a volunteer and as a program advocate. (See Figure 2.)

Implications

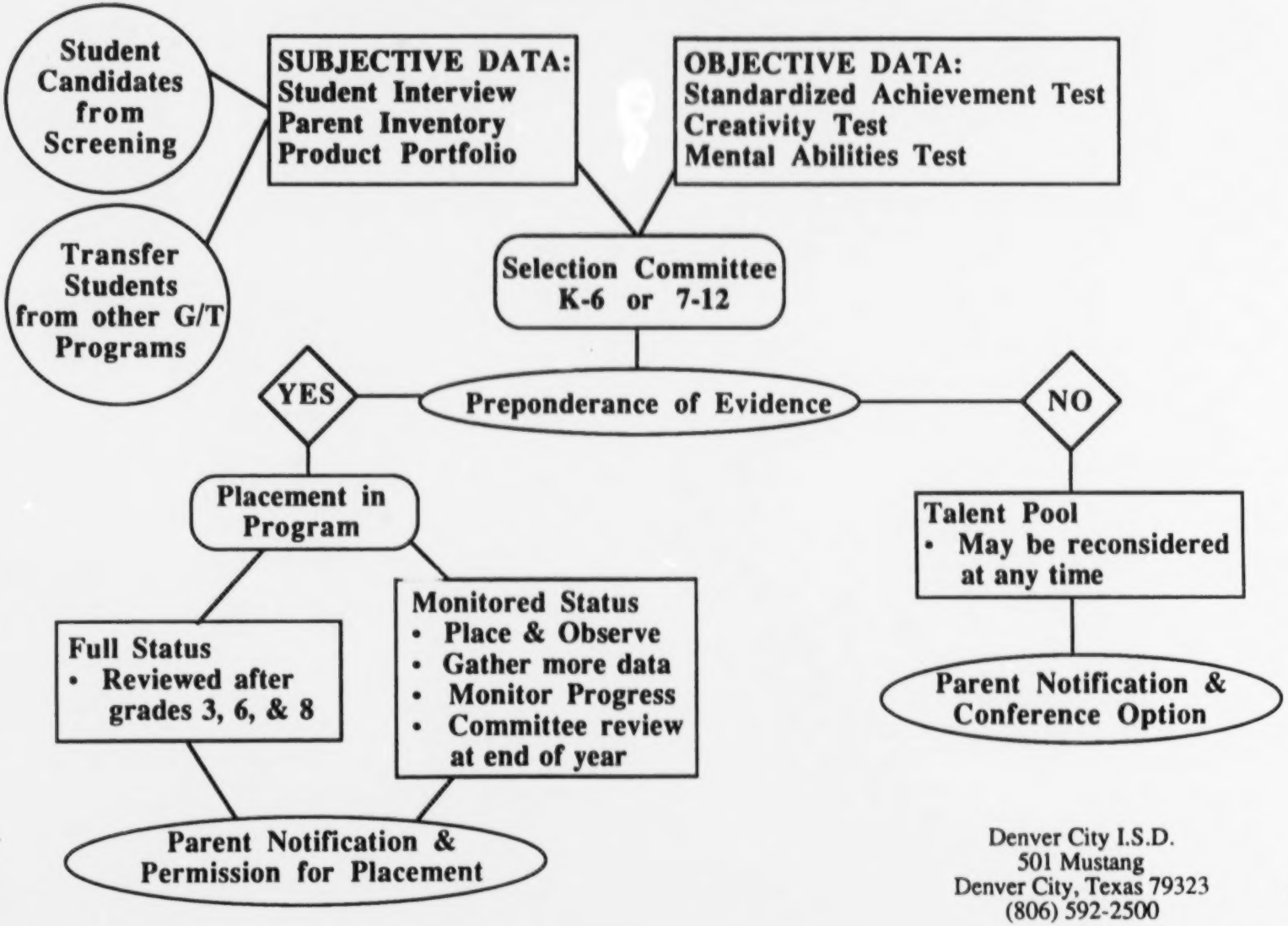
It is when qualitative and quantitative methods systematically converge in a holistic process that programs can be developed around the needs of students, rather than student identification being premised upon a program agenda. The holistic approach enables the structure of an inclusive process to find and bring children into an inviting array of possibilities. The holistic process uncovers potential and provides program access to gifted youth from rurally isolated, experientially or economically disadvantaged backgrounds, homes with a primary language other than English, or other traditionally neglected populations.

The holistic approach is an adaptive one. Small school districts may choose to have a single screening and a single selection committee to serve their kindergarten through high school populations.

Large districts could develop their own modification of the holistic process, possibly by clustering several campuses together to form representational membership in multiple screening and selection committees. Professionals and parents representing diverse campuses might share or rotate membership on cohort committees serving campus clusters. If campus cluster committees worked specifically to identify potentially gifted youth and toward the greater effort to serve all students of the district, the reliability, integrity, and consistency of the committees' decisions, as well as the program vision, could be maintained.

FIGURE 2

SELECTION PROCESS



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Conclusion

The most powerful attribute of the holistic approach is that it empowers professionals and parents within a thoughtful committee-based process. The holistic approach, in contrast to a matrix method, takes more time and includes more people. This method should be viewed, rather, as an investment in the genuine power of collaborative and reflective decision-making by professionals and parents working in concert to recognize and celebrate human potential.

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UPCOMING CONFERENCES

National/State Leadership Training Institute for Gifted and Talented
The C³ Model in Action

April 24-26, 1991
Houston Marriot West Loop

Creative Workshop Associates
Excellence Without Elitism

April 30, 1991
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14th Annual Conference

November 20-23, 1991
Dallas/Fort Worth Hyatt & Twin Towers

Texas Education Agency
Division of Gifted/Talented Education

February 16-18, 1992
Hyatt Regency Austin

Using Product Portfolios for Student Assessment for Gifted Programs

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Lubbock Independent School District
Lubbock, Texas

As Texas enters into mandatory kindergarten-12 gifted education, districts throughout the state will be initiating identification processes or evaluating existing processes in efforts to successfully identify ***all*** segments of their gifted populations. Districts that have gained experience in student identification during the developmental years of the Texas program for gifted students can serve as resources for novice districts as they search for nonbiased measures to assure that all gifted populations in their districts are fairly represented. This article provides information about Lubbock Independent School District's development and utilization of student portfolios as a nonbiased criteria for gifted identification. Information is provided relating to the stages of Lubbock's portfolio development, the district's portfolio curriculum for kindergarten, and the mechanics involved in implementing its use as a product and performance identification tool.

The Texas State Plan/Guidelines for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (1990) states that a minimum of five criteria must be reviewed for each nominated student. These criteria ***must*** include both objective and subjective assessments with consideration given to assure that the following specific groups have not been overlooked:

1) racial, ethnic, or minority group students,
2) culturally different,
3) handicapped students,
4) economically disadvantaged,
5) students who do not take advantage of options because of gender stereotyping,
6) students who display various types of classroom behavior such as disruptiveness, extreme shyness, excessively high energy levels, continuous questioning, intense anxiety, and short attention spans.

(Texas Education Agency, 1990)

This guideline is designed to assure that ***hidden*** gifted students are provided with opportunities to demonstrate gifts and talents that might not be readily observed in classroom participation or evidenced in traditional/standardized testing.

For the past five years, Lubbock Independent School District has explored the use of student portfolios in conjunction with a product and performance identification measure to help uncover this hidden population. Lubbock became involved in the use of portfolios as a result of its participation as one of the Institutes for Teachers of Young Disadvantaged Gifted Students. With the help of federal funding the Texas Education Agency sponsored these institutes for three years to develop new nontraditional measures to better identify disadvantaged gifted students and to train classroom teachers in their identification and appropriate differentiated teaching methods.

Dr. Sandra Kaplan of the National/State Leadership Training Institute on the Gifted and the Talented (N/S-LTI-G/T) served as the project's consultant and trainer for the staffs of these institutes. Dr. Kaplan assigned the staffs of the institute sites the task of selecting and adapting a nontraditional identification measure to better identify their disadvantaged gifted population. Lubbock selected Kaplan's recommended ***academic portfolio*** as their site's institute project. For two summers, a portfolio model was used with the potentially gifted pre kindergarten through second grade students enrolled in the institute's three week practicum. This new identification tool, used in conjunction with a products and performance checklist, helped the district successfully identify students who previously had not met district guidelines.

The initial success experienced with portfolios in the institute setting prompted the district, in 1987, to pilot portfolios during the regular school year. Kindergarten was selected as the target grade level due to the limited entry information on these students and the fact that objective measures can easily be influenced by previous limited environmental exposures and insecurity in an unfamiliar setting.

A ***Me at My Best*** portfolio curriculum (Dougherty, 1987) was developed for use with all kindergarten students in the district's sixteen ***CIMA***[1] cluster schools. Each fall semester, the district's K-1st grade gifted resource teacher goes into kindergarten classrooms and uses the curriculum ***Me at My Best*** as she works with students and their teachers. They work to develop an understanding of individual ***specialties*** and the use of portfolios to share one's specialities with others. The portfolio curriculum is divided into three lessons that are supplemented with both classroom and home extension activities.

The first lesson emphasizes the discovery of classmates similarities and differences and recognizes that differences produce individual specialities. The second lesson focuses on helping students acknowledge their own personal specialities and how their ***Me at My Best*** examples may be collected in a portfolio. The final lesson emphasizes various product challenges that can assist students in demonstrating their very best skills. Lessons are tied to kindergarten essential elements and reinforced by classroom activities and letters such as the one on page 14.

These lessons and activities lead to student created portfolios showcasing their individual gifts and talents. The contents of these portfolios provide teachers with additional gifted nomination screening input, assuring careful consideration of all students.

A products and performance checklist instrument is then used in conjunction with the portfolios of nominated students. This form allows for the recording of examples of the presence of eight selected traits indicative of giftedness as found in portfolio entries and/or exhibited in classroom performance situations. Teachers bring these checklists and student portfolios to campus-level program placement meetings attended by the teacher, counselor, CIMA coordinator or resource teacher, and principal. The committee reviews the checklist and portfolio contents and then, as a group, makes decisions as to which of the eight gifted traits are ***strongly*** evidenced. For each trait the committee acknowledges, the student receives one point. The accumulated points are then recorded in a ratio of accumulated points to possible points (Example: **5/8** would indicate a student's strong exhibition of five of the possible eight traits on the products and performance checklist). This figure is recorded on the CIMA student identification profile along with information from other screening instruments. The product and performance district line on the profile is set on five out of eight traits. Students meeting or exceeding this ratio receive one of three required criteria qualifications needed for placement in the CIMA program.[2]

For the past three years, all grade levels other than kindergarten have been using the Products and Performance Checklist in isolation (without individual portfolios) as their nontraditional subjective identification measure. Teachers write in descriptions of observed traits and provide explanations and/or sample examples during placement meetings to assist the committee in reaching a final ratio decision. Although this method has been serviceable, there are two strong validity reasons for the inclusion of student portfolios with product and performance checklists. The first reason is that students have a personal feel for their successful endeavors. By providing them with an

[1] Lubbock's acronym for their gifted program--Creative Intruction for Maximum Achievement, also the Spanish word for "summit."

[2] Editors' Note: Many districts that use the portfolio as an assessment measure give it a holistic rating such as "Superior," "Average," Below Average" rather than giving a numerical score.

Dear Kindergarteners,

I will be back to see you in your classroom on _____. Remember your promise that you would share <u>your</u> portfolios with me on my next visit??? Well, my next visit is <u>almost</u> here.

I'm **really** looking forward to seeing the "specialties" you have been saving in your portfolios. I know you are doing a super job gathering your best work. Did you remember to bring some things from home????

Be sure to have some "specialties" in your portfolio to share with me when I come. Let's look at your portfolios together, and I will also share some portfolio activity ideas with you and your teacher.

I can't wait to see what you have done!!!!

Developed by Edie Dougherty
Lubbock Independent School District

STUDENT PRODUCTS AND PERFORMANCE EXAMPLES

Use the spaces below to jot down classroom situations that provide evidence of a student's possession of any of the following G/T characteristics. Information may be transferred at a later date to individual student's Products and Performance Checklist.

HIGH QUALITY WORK	ADVANCED VOCABULARY	LEADERSHIP SKILLS	IN-DEPTH UNDERSTANDING
ADVANCED WOR	DETAILED PRESENTATION	CREATIVE RESPONSES	KEEN HUMOR

Developed by Lubbock Independent School District

opportunity to submit what they consider to be their best work, the validity of representative data is increased. Students may well possess *hidden* talents they are aware of that are not readily evidenced in the classroom setting. Student opinions about their best work need to be considered by placement committees as they consider students for gifted placement. A second reason for portfolio inclusion is the fact that student portfolio entries can supply placement committees with concrete examples of student abilities, thereby providing additional support to the teacher's subjective product and performance data.

Dr. Susan Johnsen, Baylor University, is currently researching Lubbock's existing product and performance data to determine: 1) how it relates to the district's other four criteria measures and 2) how valid portfolios and product and performance data are in predicting future performance in the gifted program. Information relating to these findings will be published upon completion of the project.

Districts that choose to become involved with portfolios will quickly recognize, as Lubbock did, the bonus derived from a curriculum that assists students in recognizing and appreciating their own strengths as well as the strengths of their peers. The potential within portfolios to produce positive affective growth and accurate, unbiased gifted identification data is only limited by the manner in which portfolios are presented to prospective students, the amount of staff support, and the resulting degree of student commitment to share themselves at their best.

(Curricular units and other materials developed by Lubbock Independent School District and described in this article may be requested by contacting the Division of Gifted/Talented Education, Texas Education Agency, 1701 North Congress Avenue, Austin, Texas 78701-1494.)

References

Texas Education Agency. (1990). The Texas State Plan and Guidelines for the Education of the Gifted/Talented. Austin, 13.

THE TEXAS STATE PLAN AND GUIDELINES FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE GIFTED/TALENTED

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Identification of Gifted/Talented Students
Questions and Answers

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I am philosophically opposed to labeling children for any special program and the gifted program in particular. Why is it necessary to formally identify these students?

In order to appropriately serve students whose needs are not being met in the regular classroom, it is necessary to develop a system for identifying them. There is no other way that we can assure that coordinated and comprehensive services are being provided to those who need them. However, there also is no question that the identification process, though undertaken with the best of intentions, will place a label on the child who is identified for services in the gifted program.

Barbara Clark (1988, 461) notes, "Labels create expectations. When using labels such as *gifted* or *honors*, we must be very clear to state the precise meaning of the terms, what it is and what it is not." It should be clearly stated that the program for gifted students is designed for those whose needs are not met in the regular classroom. It is not a reward for good behavior. It is not an assurance of future success, either in school or in life. It is, simply, a way of assuring that these students will receive an educational program that challenges them to meet their potential. To safeguard against concerns regarding the identifying of children for special programs, educators should be careful in using the terms except in reference to the special program placement.

You say that labels create expectations. What about those students who we are labeling "not gifted"?

No sensitive or knowledgeable educator would ever say a child was "not gifted." Identification for the gifted program, like that of other programs, is ongoing, which means no one is excluded from consideration for program participation. The needs that require students to be placed in the gifted program are exhibited by children at different times and ages. Students may enter the program at any grade level at which it is indicated that the student requires its services. By the same token, students whose needs require additional services in the early grades may in later grades be better served in the regular classroom.

Why is early identification of gifted students so important?

District definitions of gifted students that are compatible with the state definition of giftedness apply to students in the primary grades as well as those served in later grades. The district's philosophy should be that students arrive at school with the characteristics associated with giftedness and deserve educational programs that address their needs from kindergarten through grade twelve.

No child should have to wait for an appropriate education or an education commensurate to recognized abilities. If young children arrive at school exhibiting behaviors and characteristics that make the regular school program inadequate, educators should provide programs that meet these needs as soon

as possible. Some educators prefer not to identify students for programs for the gifted in the early elementary grades. They believe it is better to wait until the child's school performance clearly indicates that the child has advanced abilities. In these cases, identification for program services usually relies heavily on test scores. When this happens, it is achievement that is often identified rather than characteristics and behaviors associated with gifted individuals. Unfortunately, by postponing appropriate educational placement for the young gifted child, there can be a loss in the child's potential. White (1975, 103) estimated that no more than 10 percent of preschoolers were "as well educated and developed as they should be." This is particularly true for children in low socioeconomic families. Gallagher (1979, 35) has warned that many parents and educators have incorrectly assumed that the talents of gifted children are basically indestructible. To the contrary, he believes that a negative or passive environment "can be expected to reduce substantially or even eliminate the high talent and ability that might have been present originally" in the young child.

What measures can be used to identify the young child?

When identifying students for gifted programs, district personnel must include at least five separate measures that are both objective and subjective in nature. The following are some points to consider when selecting measures for student identification.

- It is true that not all objective measures are appropriate for use with the very young child, but there are objective measures that can be used effectively.

  Those that are available are often suggested for use with individuals rather than with groups of young children. Caution and common sense should be used when selecting objective measures.

- Subjective measures that districts might consider would include teacher and parent ratings. Examples should be provided to parents or other community members who are asked to assess their own or other children. Student portfolios or other student products can be used to assist in identifying young children.

If more information is needed regarding specific objective and subjective measures, districts are encouraged to contact their education service center consultants in gifted education or call the Division of Gifted/Talented at the Texas Education Agency.

I am uncomfortable using objective measures with children in kindergarten and first grade. Why can't I use only subjective measures?

Chapter 89, Subchapter C of the Texas Administrative Code states that both objective and subjective measures must be used to identify students for gifted programs. When using objective measures at the kindergarten and primary grades, most districts use only one such instrument. However, concern regarding the validity of many objective measures at the kindergarten level may be justified. More and more districts feel that the information they receive from alternative assessment measures such as student portfolios, observation inventories, planned activities, and teacher and parent nomination forms provides them with an accurate, holistic picture of the child's ability. If a district wishes to develop an identification procedure at the kindergarten and primary grade levels that relies solely on subjective criteria, they may request a waiver for the rule, following the procedures included in §61.31 of the Texas Administrative Code.

If students are identified in kindergarten, isn't there a greater chance of making a mistake?

Not really. It is important to remember that the purpose of identifying students as gifted

is to provide the most appropriate educational placement for them. If the students' needs at kindergarten indicate that something beyond the regular program is needed to help them maximize their potential, they should receive those services. Even if it is determined later that a student does not need the services of the program, it does not mean that a mistake was made in the earlier placement.

Educators know that some students take longer than others to adjust to a school setting. They also know that not all students progress at the same rate. There is no doubt that some students not included in the kindergarten program will show their abilities at a later age. That is the reason for ongoing identification. However, those students who clearly have the potential should be served when that potential is first observed.

Why do I have to identify kindergarten students by the end of the first semester? I don't think that is enough time.

There is no State Board requirement or legislative mandate that requires that kindergarten students be identified by the end of the first semester. Because identification of students at the kindergarten level should be primarily observational in nature, services designed to assist in the identification process must occur during the kindergarten year. However, data may be collected throughout the year, with identification of students taking place before the submission of Table V of the second semester *Principal's Semester Report of Student Attendance and Contact Hours*.

What is the purpose of using a committee to select students for the gifted program?

Chapter 89, Subchapter C of the Texas Administrative Code states that final selection of students shall be made by a committee of at least three local district educators who have received training in the area of gifted education. The committee reviews all subjective and objective data that have been compiled on each student nominated for the gifted program. A minimum of five criteria is required by the Texas Administrative Code, but ideally more information is reviewed. During the review process, the committee looks for student strengths and assesses the educational needs that are inferred from the diagnostic information. The committee is charged with the responsibility of determining which students have needs that are not likely to be met in the regular school program. Giftedness is multi-faceted; therefore, the committee must keep in mind the area of ability the gifted program will serve and identify the students who have strengths or potential in that area.

In cases where a district cut-off score is used on a matrix or profile, some decisions will be made easily, as students will clearly qualify by meeting the required cut-off or by having a specific cut-off score on three out of five measures. The committee should review data on students who do not meet these requirements and make a professional decision about the appropriate educational placement of those students.

Should parents be included as members of the selection committee?

While Chapter 89, Subchapter C of the Texas Administrative Code states that the committee shall be made up of at least three local district educators, there is nothing in rule or law that prohibits parents from serving on the committee. Some districts have had very good results using a parent representative on the committee as well. The parent who serves on the committee is able to assure the community that a fair assessment was made and the process was handled in a professional manner. If parents do serve on the committee, it is recommended that student names not be used. Data reviewed by the committee are confidential. If and when it becomes necessary to discuss students by name, the parent should be excused.

State Board rule requires that identification committee members receive training. What kind of training should be provided and how many hours should it be?

Chapter 89, Subchapter C of the Texas Administrative Code requires that training be provided to members of the identification committee. However, it does not require a set number of hours or mention specific topics. It is the responsibility of the district to determine committee needs. Certainly all educators should be informed about the needs and characteristics of gifted students, what their expected competencies are, and what type of program is planned to meet these needs.

Remember, too, that all staff really are part of the identification process because they may nominate students for program participation. Therefore, districts might want to offer some training to all staff members. It is especially important to train coordinators of special education and bilingual programs. These programs train educators to be excellent appraisers of students' abilities, but sometimes they forget that a child can be both gifted and bilingual or gifted and handicapped.

Can identification criteria vary from one grade level to another?

Yes, almost all districts use different criteria at different grade levels. As an example, districts that have a program for general intellectual ability in the elementary grades frequently change the program focus to specific subject matter aptitude at the secondary level. In the early grades, criteria may include a composite score on an achievement test. Later, specific areas of that test might be used--the mathematics component for a science or mathematics program or the reading comprehension section for a program emphasizing language arts. Some districts use grades at the secondary level and not at the elementary. Districts may use one set of criteria at the kindergarten/primary level, modify their criteria at the upper elementary grades, and further modify the measures at the secondary level.

Do I need to re-identify students already in the program when program identification criteria change?

No. In fact, according to Chapter 89, Subchapter C of the Texas Administrative Code, districts shall not re-identify students for the program. If students are doing well, there is no reason to include them in a re-screening and selection process. They have already been selected and their successful performance proves that they are in the program that best fits their educational needs. It is important, however, to re-screen those nominated students who have previously been considered for the program but were not included in it.

The rules require that data and procedures used in the identification committee should assist in assuring that the program for gifted students reflects the population of the district as a whole. What are some suggestions to assist in implementing this rule?

The first step in assuring that data and procedures permit equal access to the program for gifted students is to review how students are nominated for services. Test scores should not be the only criterion for nominations. Additional sources might be teacher, parent, or peer nomination. In some cases, districts permit students to nominate themselves for further consideration. As noted in *The Texas State Plan and Guidelines for the Education of the Gifted/Talented,* all kindergarten students should be considered nominated for the

program and viewed as potential candidates for program services.

The next step would be a review of the instruments used as part of the identification process. Instruments should be appropriate for the student population. Districts should keep in mind that, although the same information should be collected on all students, it is not necessary to use the same instrument to collect that information. In many cases, switching from one type of aptitude test to another, or permitting students to take a test in their home language, may make a considerable difference in student performance.

It also is suggested that districts investigate using non-traditional assessment measures such as student portfolios, observation inventories, and planned activities as part of their assessment process. While these measures require more time, often they help educators get a fairer assessment of how a child learns and processes information than the data that are derived from an objective test. Emphasis should be on a child's potential and ability for learning, rather than on a child's knowledge base, which may be influenced by environmental advantages. Districts also should assure that students with handicapping conditions are provided the opportunity to take required tests or participate in observational assessments that enable the student to show his or her maximum potential.

After reviewing the instruments used, the process itself should be examined. In most cases, using a committee that reviews case studies or profiles of students on a wide array of activities and instruments will increase participation from underrepresented populations. The committee should include an advocate for special populations. This person, who may be a non-voting member of the committee, can provide information that is helpful as part of the review process. As an example, committee members may need more information regarding test taking performances of students making the transition from bilingual programs or of students with learning disabilities. The advocate can provide that information, thereby assuring that assessment information is more accurately reviewed.

Most importantly, district personnel must understand that the characteristics of gifted students are the same, regardless of cultural or socio-economic groups. However, how those characteristics are manifested varies in different populations, and educators who recommend students for program services must be sensitive to this fact. Training on how the populations in their specific community might reveal their potential is an important step in modifying expectations regarding the performance of disadvantaged youth.

What should I include in an appeals procedure?

Although State Board rule requires that an appeals process must be included as a part of the identification procedure, the district has the latitude of developing a policy that best meets its needs. In many cases, districts will review appeal policies that are used in other programs and will use these as a model for the one included for the program for gifted students. The following recommendations might be considered for inclusion in an appeals process.

Information on the identification process should explain how to initiate the appeals process. Generally, the program coordinator or building principal receives the appeal from parents or teachers. In most cases, the concern is sent to a committee that reviews the child's assessment information and makes a determination as to whether or not the child should be placed in the program. Some districts require that the person issuing the appeal must have additional data for the committee to review. In larger districts, the committees usually are campus level committees, although many districts prefer to use a district wide committee to assure that there is uniformity in decisions.

What is required in the district transfer policy?

Chapter 89, Subchapter C of the Texas Administrative Code states that school districts shall develop written policies on student identification that are approved by the local board of trustees and include a transfer policy. The provisions in the transfer policy are left up to the local district. There are several things to remember when adopting a transfer policy. The Texas Education Code, §21.652 states that a program shall be established for identified gifted and talented students in each grade level. When an identified gifted student transfers to a new district, the student's educational needs should be addressed as soon as possible. The student should not have to wait for an appropriate education. Certainly a district will want to consider the area of ability for which the student was identified in the sending district. If it is the same, the district may wish to automatically place the student in the program. Some do this on a probationary term to determine if the program and student are a good match. Other districts will take it as an automatic nomination, but require the application of local district criteria before making a decision. If the area of ability is different, the district may wish to collect data required by the local district criteria and have the information go to the selection committee to make a decision. Regardless of the transfer policy adopted, the caution is to do it as expediently as possible.

What must be taken into consideration when adopting an exit policy?

Even though an exit policy is required by Chapter 89, Subchapter C of the Texas Administrative Code there is nothing in rule or law that dictates the criteria for the policy. It should be remembered that multiple criteria have been used to identify students for the gifted program. Principle 3.6 in *The Texas State Plan and Guidelines for the Education of the Gifted/Talented* states that just as no single criterion such as an IQ score, teacher nomination, or grades can be the determining factor for selection, neither can it be for exiting.

It should be stressed once again that the purpose of the program for gifted students is to meet an educational need. If and when that need no longer exists, several factors will be indicative of the need for exiting. In the past many districts have used grade point average as a sole criterion for exiting students from the gifted program. This is not recommended as it makes the program for gifted students appear to be a prize to be earned rather than a program to meet an educational need. Case studies are available to indicate that some gifted individuals received poor grades all through school. Even though the grades may be poor, the gifted program may still be the best educational placement for the student.

The only valid reason for a school district exiting a student from the program is the determination of professionals, students, or parents that the individual is not placed appropriately in the program for the gifted. This determination is not based on one or two episodes in a class, but over a period of time in which assistance has been provided continuously to the child and the parents have been notified and are aware of the situation. It will be important for district personnel to determine the psychological, social, or academic reasons why the student is not successful in the program. If no extenuating factors are responsible for the student's inability to complete or master the skills taught in the class, then, after at least one parent conference, the child should be exited from the program and placed in one that more appropriately matches the student's cognitive ability.

Must I identify 5 percent of the students in the district? Can I identify more than 5 percent of the students in the district?

There is no quota on the number of students who can or should be accepted to the district's program. State funding is available for up to 5 percent of a district's average daily

attendance. However, a district is not required to identify 5 percent of its population. If more students are found than the 5 percent funding cap set by the Texas Legislature, the district has the obligation to serve these students in the appropriate educational setting. There should not be a waiting list of students who qualify but are not served in the program, and a program for the gifted should never be considered "full."

At the same time, it should be remembered that the gifted program is designed to meet the needs of students who require services not already provided in the regular school program. If a district discovers that, as an example, 20 percent or more of the students are being identified for services, it may be that the regular curriculum should be reviewed and enriched so that it meets the needs of more students.

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